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THE HUMAN DESIGN

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PROGRAM OF POLICY STUDIES IN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

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INTRODUCTION

"Every social and political system can be regarded as an experiment in the broad perspectives of time. ...the human design will in the long run force any experiment to accommodate it."

In his description of the human design Hadley Cantril unifies the two cultures in a scientific humanism to which we may all aspire. His article "The Human Design" reflects the dual concern of our civilization for the individual and for objective truth.

Why explore space? Why probe the ocean depths? Why concern ourselves with worldwide development? Why the vast investment in military security? Why the push for civil rights? Why is urban synthesis seen as vital?

The answers we give may fit the issues and institutions of the moment. But the validity of all answers will be tested against the compelling requirements of the human design--in all its dimensions. And in this shrinking world they will be measured against the needs of men everywhere--in the family, the community, the nation, but equally throughout the globe.

Scientists and engineers, politicians and administrators, in the laboratory or in the forum, will find profit in pausing to read and to consider the complex needs of the being they are and for whom they labor.

- V. P. Rock

With the mounting discussion of "existentialist" and "humanistic" psychology on both sides of the Atlantic, together with the search of political scientists for a psychological interpretation useful for their level of analysis, it seems appropriate to try to spell out what seem to be the demands human beings impose on any society or political culture because of their genetically built-in design. Furthermore, in bringing together recently in summary form the conclusions of a cross-national study of 13 different countries, I kept realizing anew that in describing differences found among people, it is all too easy to neglect basic functional uniformities which take diverse forms and to leave the accounting or explanation at that level. Differences are often dramatic and easier to detect than the similarities they may obscure. Here I shall try to orchestrate the diversities of mankind found in different societies into some systematic unity.

The aspects of "human nature" differentiated here are those that seem to me to be pointed to by the data of psychology and by the observations sensitive observers have made of the way people live their lives in a variety of circumstances. I shall try to use a level of accounting appropriate both to an understanding of people and to an understanding of social and political systems. In doing this some of the absurdities may be avoided that result when a single man-made abstraction, usually devised to account for some single aspect of behavior, is the sole theme song. As the different characteristics of the human design are reviewed here, it must be recognized and emphasized that they all overlap, intertwine and are interdependent. One must differentiate artificially in order to focus and describe.

1. Man requires the satisfaction of his survival needs. Any listing of the characteristics of any living organism must begin here. Neurophysiologists have located and described in a most general way two built-in appetitive systems found in higher animals: one system propelling them to seek satisfying and pleasurable experiences, the other protecting them from threatening or unpleasant experiences.[1] These two systems together can be thought of as the basic forces contained within all human beings which not only keep them and the species alive as their

simple survival needs for food, shelter and sex are gratified, but that are involved in the desire for life itself.

These appetitive systems of course become enormously developed, refined and conditioned, especially in man, as new ways are learned to achieve satisfactions and avoid dangers and discomforts. It has often been noted that unless the survival needs are satisfied, a person devotes himself almost exclusively to a continued attempt to fulfill them, a preoccupation which pre-empts his energies and repels any concern for other activities. Most people in the world today are still concerned with living a type of life that constitutes well-being on a relatively simple level with what amenities their cultures can provide.

2. Man wants security both in its physical and its psychological meaning to protect gains already made and to assure a beachhead from which further advances may be staged. Man wants some surety that one action can lead to another, some definite prehension which provides an orientation and integration through time. People invariably become embittered if they nurse a dream for what they regard as a long time with no signs of it becoming a reality.

In this connection it should be recalled that the story of evolution seems to tell us that members of every species stake out some territory for themselves within which they can provide for their needs and carry on their living, the extent of this territory being dependent on what is required for the survival of the species and being extended if it will contribute to such survival. In the present era the territories human beings stake out for themselves are largely bounded by the nation-state, a territorial unit rapidly replacing narrower geographical and psychological identifications but doing so just at the time when it is becoming more and more apparent that the concept of nation itself limits and threatens man's development in an age of increasing interdependence and highly developed weaponry.

3. Man craves sufficient order and certainty in his life to enable him to judge with fair accuracy what will or will not occur if he does or does not act in certain ways. People want sufficient form and pattern in life to be sure that certain satisfactions

already enjoyed will be repeatable and will provide a secure springboard for take-offs in new directions.

The conflict of old loyalties with emerging new loyalties in the case of developing people is bound to create uncertainties, doubts and hesitations. If people become frustrated and anxious enough, they will do almost anything in a desperate attempt to put some order into apparent chaos or rally around new symbols and abstractions that enable them to identify with a new order that promises to alleviate the uncertainties experienced in the here and now.

In stressing process and change, the desire of people to preserve the status quo when it has proved satisfying and rewarding and to protect existing forms against alteration must never be overlooked. And the craving for certainty would include the satisfactions that come from the sense of stability provided by our habitual behavior--including much of our social and political behavior.

4. Human beings continuously seek to enlarge the range and to enrich the quality of their satisfactions. There is a ceaseless quest impelling man to extend the range and quality of his satisfactions through the exercise of his creative and inventive capacities. This is, of course, a basic reason why order of any kind is constantly being upset. Whitehead expressed the point eloquently and repeatedly, for example, in his statements that "The essence of life is to be found in the frustrations of established order"[2] and that "The art of progress is to preserve order amid change, and to preserve change amid order."[3]

The distinguished British philosopher John Macmurray has used the phrase The Self as Agent as the title of his book[4] analyzing the role of action in man's constant search for value-satisfactions. And in a companion volume he has noted that "Human behavior cannot be understood, but only caricatured, if it is represented as an adaptation to environment."[5] The search for an enlargement of satisfactions in the transactions of living can also be phrased as the desire for development in a direction, the desire to do something which will bring a sense of accomplishment as we experience the consequences of successfully carrying out some

intention, and thereby have an occasional feeling that our lives are continuous creations in which we can take an active part. During a conversation in Beirut, a wise man once remarked to me that "people are hungry for new and good experiences."

It seems worthwhile to differentiate this search for value-satisfactions into two varieties: (a) value-satisfactions that are essentially new, different, more efficient, more reliable, more pleasurable or more status-producing results of activity along familiar and tried dimensions, and (b) value-satisfactions that are new in the sense of being emergent, a new quality a person discovers or creates himself for the first time as does the child who tries out and relishes new experiences as his own developmental pattern unfolds. The former variety, like the growth on the limb of a tree, builds people out and extends their range, while the latter, like the new growth at the top of the tree, lets them attain new heights and see new vistas. The satisfactions sought by a newly developing people are at first most likely to be of the former type.

The particular value-satisfactions man acquires are the result of learning. Some of the values learned will serve as the operative ideals of a people, others will be chiefly instrumental. People in rich countries have learned to want and to expect many aspects of a good life that less favored people have not yet learned are possibilities. From this point of view one might say that the competition between social and political systems is a competition in teaching people what to want, what is potentially available to them and then proving to them in their own private experience that these wants are best attainable under the system described.

5. Human beings are creatures of hope and are not genetically designed to resign themselves. This characteristic of man stems from the characteristic just described: that man is always likely to be dissatisfied and never fully "adapts" to his environment.

Man seems continually to hope that the world he encounters will correspond more and more to his vision of it as he acts within it to carry out his purposes, while the vision itself continuously unfolds in an irreversible direction. The whole

process is a never-ending one. It is characteristic of man in his on-going experience to ask himself "Where do I go from here?" Only in his more reflective moods does a person ask "Where did I come from?" or "How did I get this way?" Most of the time, most people who are plugged into the changing world around them are future-oriented in their concerns.

6. Human beings have the capacity to make choices and the desire to exercise this capacity. Any mechanical model of man constructed by a psychologist or by anyone else is bound to leave out the crucially important characteristic of man as an "appetitive-perceptive agency." Perceptions are learned and utilized by people to provide prognoses or bets of a variety of kinds to weigh alternative courses of action to achieve purposes. Consciously or without conscious awareness, people are trying to perceive the probable relation between their potential acts and the consequences of these acts to the intentions that constitute their goals.

The human nervous system, including the brain, has the capacity to police its input, to determine what is and what is not significant for it and to pay attention to and to reinforce or otherwise modify its behavior as it transacts in the occasions of living.[6] In this sense, the human being is a participant in and producer of his own value-satisfactions: people perceive only what is relevant to their purposes and make their choices accordingly.

7. Human beings require freedom to exercise the choices they are capable of making. This characteristic of man related to freedom is deliberately worded as it is, rather than as a blanket statement that "Human beings require freedom," since the freedom people want is so relative to their desires and the stage of development they have attained. Human beings, incidentally, apparently require more freedom than other species of animals because of their much greater capacity to move about and to engage in a much wider variety of behavior.

While it seems true that maximum freedom is a necessary condition if a highly developed individual is to obtain maximum value-satisfaction, it is equally true, as many people have pointed out, that too much freedom too soon can be an unbearable burden and a source of bondage if people, like children, are

insufficiently developed to know what to do with it. For freedom clearly involves a learning of responsibility and an ability to take advantage of it wisely.

The concept of freedom is essentially a psychological and not a political concept. It describes the opportunity of an individual to make his own choices and act accordingly. Psychologically, freedom refers to the freedom to experience more of what is potentially available, the freedom to move about and ahead, to be and to become. Freedom is thus less and less determined and more of a reality as man evolves and develops; it emerges and flowers as people learn what it can mean to them in terms of resolving some frustrations under which they are living.

The authoritarian leadership sometimes required to bring about man's awakening and to start him on the road to his definition of progress appears to go against the grain of the human design once man is transformed into a self-conscious citizen who has the desire to exercise the capacity latent within him. The definition of freedom in the Soviet dictionary, Ushakov, as "the recognition of necessity" is limited to those periods in the life of an individual or a people when they are willing to let others define what is necessary and to submerge their own individuality.

8. Human beings want to experience their own identity and integrity, more popularly referred to as the need for personal dignity. Every human being craves a sense of his own self-constancy, an assurance of the repeatability of experience in which he is a determining participant. He obtains this from the transactions he has with other individuals.

People develop significances they share with others in their membership and reference groups. If the satisfaction and significance of participation with others ceases to confirm assumptions or to enrich values, then a person's sense of self-constancy becomes shaken or insecure, his loyalties become formalized and empty or are given up altogether. He becomes alienated or seeks new significances, new loyalties that are more operationally real.

9. People want to experience a sense of their own worthwhileness. This differentiation is made from the desire for personal

identity and integrity to bring out the important relationship between this search for identity and the behavior and attitudes of others toward us. A human being wants to know he is valued by others and that others will somehow show through their behavior that his own behavior and its consequences make some sort of difference to them in ways that give him a sense of satisfaction. When this occurs, not only is a person's sense of identity confirmed, but he also experiences a sense of personal worth and self-respect. The process of extending the sense of Self both in space and in time appears also to involve the desire that one's "presence" shall not be limited merely to the here and now of existence but will extend into larger dimensions.

People acquire, maintain, and enrich their sense of worthwhileness only if they at least vaguely recognize the sources of what personal identity they have: from their family, their friends and neighbors, their associates or fellow workers, their group ties or their nations. The social, religious, intellectual, regional, or national loyalties formed play the important role of making it possible for individuals to extend themselves backward into the past, forward into the future and to identify themselves with others who live at more or less remote distances from them. This means the compounding of shared experiences into a bundle that can be conceptualized, felt, or somehow referred to in the here and now of daily living, thus making a person feel a functional part of a more enduring alliance. Man accomplishes such feats of self-extension largely through his capacity to create symbols, images, and myths which provide focal points for identification and self-expansion. After reviewing the lessons from history, Herbert Muller noted as one of the "forgotten simplicities" the fact that "Men have always been willing to sacrifice themselves for some larger cause, fighting and dying for their family, tribe, or community, with or without hope of eternal reward."[7]

10. Human beings seek some value or system of beliefs to which they can commit themselves. In the midst of the probabilities and uncertainties that surround them, people want some anchoring points, some certainties, some faith that will serve either as a beacon light to guide them or a balm to assuage them during the inevitable frustrations and anxieties living engenders.

People who have long been frustrated and who have searched for means to alleviate their situations are, of course, particularly susceptible to a commitment to a new system of beliefs or an ideology that they feel holds promise of effective action.

Beliefs are confirmed in so far as action based on them brings satisfying consequences and they are denied with growing skepticism if disastrous results consistently occur because they are followed.

Commitment to a value or belief system becomes more difficult among well informed and sophisticated people who self-consciously try to reconcile what they believe with what they know and what they know with what they believe. In such circumstances, beliefs become more secular and less important as personal identifications.

11. Human beings want a sense of surety and confidence that the society of which they are a part holds out a fair degree of hope that their aspirations will be fulfilled. If people cannot experience the effectivity of social mechanisms to accomplish some of the potential goals they aspire to, then obviously their frustrations and anxieties mount, they search for new means to accomplish aims. On the other hand, they make any sacrifice required to protect a society they feel is fulfilling their needs but appears seriously threatened.

It cannot be stressed too strongly that any people will become apathetic toward or anxious about ultimate goals they would like to achieve through social organizations if they continually sense a lack of reliability in the means provided to accomplish these goals. Obviously any society that is to be viable must satisfy basic survival needs, must provide security, must insure the repeatability of value-satisfactions already attained and provide for new and emerging satisfactions. The effective society is one that enables the individual to develop personal loyalties and aspirations which overlap with and are congenial to social values and loyalties, and which at the same time take full account of the wide range of individual differences that exist.

Such a social organization must, too, become the repository of values, must provide symbols for people's aspirations, must

comprise and contain customs, institutions, laws, economic arrangements and political forms which enable an individual in various ways to give concrete reference to his values in his day-to-day behavior. If the gap between what his society actually provides in terms of effective mechanisms for living and what it purports to provide becomes too great, the vacuum created will sooner or later engender the frustrations that urge people on to seek new social patterns and new symbols. Whitehead wrote:

> The major advances in civilization are processes which all but wreck the societies in which they occur--like unto an arrow in the hand of a child. The art of free society consists first in the maintenance of the symbolic code; and secondly in fearlessness of revision, to secure that the code serves those purposes which satisfy an enlightened reason. Those societies which cannot combine reverence to their symbols with freedom of revision, must ultimately decay either from anarchy, or from the slow atrophy of a life stifled by useless shadows.[8]

Every social and political system can be regarded as an experiment in the broad perspective of time. Whatever the experiment, the human design will in the long run force any experiment to accommodate it. This has been the case throughout human history. And few would deny that the varied patterns of experiments going on today hold out more promise of satisfying the human condition for a greater number of people than ever before.

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